

Message Text

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11

ACTION EA-14

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CIAE-00 DODE-00 INR-10 NSAE-00 PA-04 USIA-15 PRS-01

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R 240736Z MAY 74

FM AMEMBASSY CANBERRA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3257

INFO CINCPAC

C O N F I D E N T I A L CANBERRA 3144

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, AS

SUBJECT: NARROW GOVERNMENT MAJORITY BEGINS TO LIMIT WHITLAM'S OPTIONS

REF: CANBERRA 3066

1. SUMMARY: IN COURSE OF CONVERSATION MAY 23, PRIME MINISTER WHITLAM TOLD ME THAT HIS PLANS FOR MID-JUNE EUROPEAN TRIP (REFTEL) ARE STILL IN AIR, SINCE ELECTION OUTCOME NOT YET CLEAR. IF LABOR MARGIN IS ONLY ONE TO THREE SEATS, HE SAID, IT WOULD BE DIFFICULT FOR HIM TO LEAVE. IF MARGIN IS FIVE OR BETTER, HE WOULD PROBABLY MAKE TRIP. HE IS CLEARLY EAGER TO GO, AND HIS PREDICAMENT IS FIRST EXAMPLE OF POLITICAL PROBLEMS WHICH VERY THIN MAJORITY WILL CAUSE FOR LABOR GOVERNMENT. END SUMMARY.

2. DURING BRIEF CONVERSATION WITH PRIME MINISTER WHITLAM MAY 23 FOLLOWING EXHIBITION FLIGHT OF NEW LOCKHEED TRISTAR JET, I ASKED HIM WHETHER HE WOULD BE PROCEEDING WITH HIS EUROPEAN TRIP. HE SAID HE WAS UNABLE TO MAKE UP HIS MIND. THE ANSWER WOULD DEPEND ON THE ELECTION OUTCOME. IF HIS MARGIN IS ONLY ONE OR THREE SEATS, IT WOULD BE DIFFICULT FOR HIM TO LEAVE WITHOUT GIVING RISE TO A LOT OF
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COMPLAINTS ABOUT HIS ABSENCE FROM CANBERRA AT A CRITI-

CAL TIME. ON THE OTHER HAND, IF HIS MAJORITY WAS FIVE OR BETTER, HE THOUGHT HE WOULD PROBABLY PROCEED WITH HIS TRIP. I ASKED HIM WHETHER HE DIDN'T THINK HIS PARTY WOULD GET AT LEAST FIVE SEATS. HE REPLIED HE FRANKLY DID NOT KNOW; IT WAS ALL UP IN THE AIR.

3. (WHITLAM'S PRINCIPAL PRIVATE SECRETARY, PETER WILENSKI, TOLD DCM MAY 23 HE THOUGHT LABOR MAJORITY MIGHT NOW BE FIVE RATHER THAN THREE SEATS. DEPUTY SECRETARY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS WOOLCOTT SAID HE HAD URGED WHITLAM NOT RPT NOT TO MAKE TRIP UNLESS LABOR HAD PARLIAMENTARY MAJORITY OF FIVE, BUT THAT WHITLAM WOULD BE SORELY TEMPTED WITH THREE. BOTH WILENSKI AND WOOLCOTT DREW ATTENTION TO HARSH EDITORIAL IN MAY 23 AUSTRALIAN CRITICIZING PM'S PLANS TO TRAVEL OVERSEAS DURING DOMESTIC POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC TROUBLES).

4. FUTHER COMMENTING ON EUROPEAN TRIP, PRIME MINISTER TOLD ME THAT HE FELT IT IMPORTANT TO VISIT EUROPE SINCE HE HAD NOT VISITED THE SOVIET UNION, UNLIKE OTHER MAJOR POWER CAPITALS. HE IS ALSO ANCIOUS TO SHOW AUSTRALIA'S INTEREST IN THE OECD COUNTRIES. AUSTRALIA FEELS THIS CONNECTION TO BE IMPORTANT, AND IT WAS HIGH TIME HE VISITED SOME OF THE OECD COUNTRIES.

5. COMMENT: WHITLAM'S ANALYSIS OF ELECTION PROSPECTS IS QUITE REALISTIC, AND HIS COMMENT THAT THE OUTCOME IS STILL UP IN THE AIR WELL DESCRIBES SITUATION. MAJORITY MUST BE ODD NUMBER, SINCE TOTAL NUMBER OF SEATS IS 127. WHEN WHITLAM REFERS TO MAJORITY OF ONE, THREE, OR FIVE SEATS, HE IS NOT RPT NOT ALLOWING FOR ELECTION OF SPEAKER OF HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, WHO DOES NOT VOTE EXCEPT IN CASE OF A TIE VOTE. HOUSE WITH NOMINAL LABOR OR LIBERAL MAJORITY OF ONE WOULD THUS BE VIRTUALLY UNGOVERNABLE AFTER ELECTION OF SPEKAER, WHILE MAJORITY OF THREE WOULD BE EXTREMELY DIFFICULT AND ONLY MAJORITY OF FIVE WOULD GIVE GOVERNMENT ADEQUATE BREATHING SPACE.

6. WHITLAM'S DISCOMFORT OVER HIS EUROPEAN TRIP PLANS IS FIRST TANGIBLE EVIDENCE OF PROBLEMS HE WILL ENCOUNTER
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WITH RAZOR THIN MAJORITY. COUNTING OF ABSENTEE AND POSTAL BALLOTS CONTINUES AT SNAIL'S PACE. AS REPORTED, FINAL RESULTS IN HOUSE ARE EXPECTED MAY 30.
GREEN

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